

Statement of Rep. Linder (R-GA)
Motion to Repeal the “Welfare Emergency Fund”
May 19, 2010

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of Mr. Price’s motion.

The 1996 Republican welfare reforms successfully increased work and earnings and reduced welfare dependence and poverty. But despite that success, opponents have spent years trying to undermine welfare reform. They saw a new opening in Democrats’ 2009 stimulus law. In that trillion-dollar bill, they created a new \$5 billion “welfare emergency fund” designed to promote welfare dependence all over again. The new fund pays States if they increase welfare caseloads, among other outcomes.

States have been less than eager to collect. By mid-May less than half – \$2.4 billion – had actually been claimed by States; only three States received full shares. You know something is wrong when the Federal government has trouble giving away money.

Mr. Price’s motion would end this program, right here and now. That is the right policy for a program that should have never been begun.

Just consider how this “emergency” money has been spent so far. One of the largest chunks has been spent on something called “non-recurrent short-term assistance.” A program operated in New York last summer offers an example. New York used these funds to make one-time \$200 payments to welfare and food stamp recipients, supposedly for “back to school” purchases. But that’s not how the money was really used. Some recipients used the money, as CBS News put it, to buy “flat screen TVs, iPods and video gaming systems.” Convenience stores in low-income areas “noted marked increases in beer, lotto and cigarette sales.” ATMs ran out of cash, so we have no idea how those funds were spent, but I suspect many can guess. I would like the CBS news article inserted in the record following my remarks.

The subcommittee on welfare on which I serve recently had a hearing on this fund. One witness noted taxpayers already spend an incredible \$953 billion per year on welfare and other low-income benefits. I asked the Administration witness sent to ask for still more welfare spending “is it your testimony that \$953 billion is not enough?” Her answer was telling: “Who’s to say what is enough?”

With this motion, we are saying “enough.” More importantly, the American people, who selected this welfare emergency fund as the very first program they want to eliminate, are saying enough. I urge all Members to support the motion.